

SOUTHERN BLIGHT ON ORCHIDS

Harry C. Burnett

Southern blight, or crown rot, Pellicularia rolfsii (Sacc.) West, is widespread on many plants in the warmer regions of the world. Among orchids in Florida, southern blight occurs on swan orchid, Cycnoches chlorochilon Klotzsch., nun's orchid, Phaius grandifolius Lour., and the moth orchid, Phalaenopsis Blume.

SYMPTOMS. The main symptoms of the disease on orchids are a rapid collapse and rotting of the roots and leaf bases. This rotting is characterized by a cream-yellow discoloration which soon turns brown because of secondary invasion of the tissue by saprophytic organisms. The formation of very small tan sclerotia on the affected tissue is a diagnostic characteristic of this fungus. These sclerotia are the size and color of mustard seed (Fig. 1). The fungus sclerotia may persist in the soil or in potting media for an indefinite period of time.

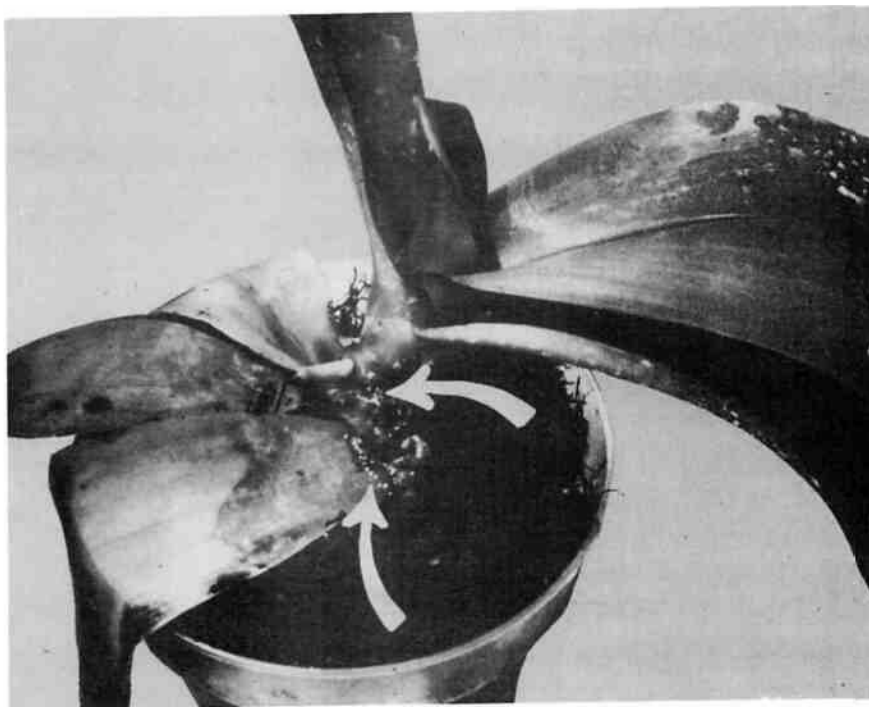


Fig. 1. Southern blight, Pellicularia rolfsii (Sacc.) West, on moth orchid, Phalaenopsis sp.

CONTROL. Affected plants should be rogued out and destroyed at the first sign of the disease symptoms. Potting media and plant containers should be sterilized with formalin, 4% solution, to eliminate any recontamination by the sclerotia.